

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

PRESENTER: In terms of lessons learned, and I think some of this stuff is probably obvious, but you need to focus on the -- if you're going to collect data, focus on the place where the information you gather is going to make the most difference, and so that means, you know, talking to the managers and finding out if there's some fairly specific areas that having information is really going to help. One of the things in retrospect for the Dillon, in Virginia City, which is the county seat of Madison County, they had vegetation that had grown up so high that they were very concerned about fire things, and then there was also the visual management system that was saying things should be a certain way, and I think probably we could have asked some questions there about the visual resource and about the vegetation where we could have provided some information to management. We didn't do that because we didn't realize it in time, but I think that a lot of times with projects like this there could be very specific questions that you can answer that's going to be helpful to management. So you really need to be interacting with that part of the team.

Another thing that I think I would have done in this area would be kind of a two-tiered approach where there's an issue if you collect information too early then you're not going to be able to get information on an impact analysis, fanned you collect it too late, you may not even be able to use it because things move so fast once impact analysis starts. So I think in the future if I was going to do this I would talk to a small number of people about the area in general, what's going on, what are their goals, and you don't need to talk to very many people to do

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

something like that, and then do some more in-depth stuff with follow-up analysis, but like Stuart said earlier, focus on what those people are interested in, not trying to find out everything from them, and I think we did too much of that in this survey. But I do think interviews definitely are worth doing, and I think people really like to be interviewed. It was -- it was very positive just from that standpoint.

Okay. I'm going to briefly go into the data collection for the King Range -- yes?

CLASS PARTICIPANT: The interviews sound like something that would be really good to do, but my concern is how do you know when you're in compliance with FACA and make sure that you are --

PRESENTER: Well, I don't think interviews are a problem with FACA because you're not making decisions. You're just gathering information. It's OMB that could be a problem -- that's a problem with surveys. So are you thinking --

CLASS PARTICIPANT: Well, you don't want to appear slanted towards one group or another --

PRESENTER: And that's why we tried to -- so throughout the process, starting with the first step in the analysis, we tried to identify the different groups that we thought that we needed -- groups and individuals that we thought we needed to talk to and we made sure that we talked to at least a certain number of people in

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

each group, and then the RAC is supposed to be representative of the different groups, so we talked to all the RAC members.

I agree, you know, the appearance of bias, or bias, is really a problem, so what we tried to do is talk to as many different people as possible, and then if you're talking to people and you tend to get the same information from people representing the same group, I would be more comfortable with what I had at that point. Does --

CLASS PARTICIPANT: , well, I don't want to get caught -- I don't know -- is there like a formula so you can make sure that you're in compliance?

PRESENTER: In compliance -- are you thinking of OMB --

CLASS PARTICIPANT: With FACA.

PRESENTER: Okay. Unless you're -- somebody may have to step in here. Unless you're making a decision, it's my understanding that that's not -- this is not an issue with FACA, because we're not -- is that -- Gale?

CLASS PARTICIPANT: We've used a lot of stakeholder groups in my project, and what we did is -- we were concerned about FACA as well. We would tell them right at the beginning that their information was being used as input so we would want to hear their ideas and suggestions and that we would use that as

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

input, but it wasn't going to be used for direct decision making. So as long as everybody understood from the very beginning that was the objective we didn't have any problems.

PRESENTER: Yeah, we didn't have any problems with regard to FACA, but we may have --

CLASS PARTICIPANT: If you have questions about that, every state has a coordinator, somebody you can go to, and you can run it by them and make sure that you have any -- make sure that they're comfortable with it and there are aren't any problems.

PRESENTER: Yes?

CLASS PARTICIPANT: I have a couple questions. First, it's easy to realize that you would probably select a RAC to speak to, but beyond that when you're taking people from the community from certain user groups, ranchers, environmental groups, recreation user groups, OHV groups, how do you pick who you're going to talk to? That's my first question.

PRESENTER: What I did was I started with the BLM specialists, and I started with the ones that seemed to be more objective, like the recreation guy, you know, in terms of motorized use: Is there anybody that represents a group in the area? Is there more than one group in the area? Is there somebody that I could

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

talk to that doesn't do things as a group but would represent another point of view? So kind of asking people to represent different points of view.

And the other thing is in terms of the quality of the information, it's not like you're trying to say -- you're trying to quantify how people feel about this. Really what you want to know is if you closed 10% of the roads, what type of an effect is this going to have on this group? And you start to get fairly standard information when you ask people that.

So, a lot of that was suggestions from the field manager and from the specialists.

CLASS PARTICIPANT: They know [inaudible] they think might be a good representative?

PRESENTER: Right, and these are small towns. Like Dillon has 2500. The other towns have less than that. So people pretty much know everybody. You know, that's not necessarily going to work in a big city -- or in a larger area. You're going to go probably much more to the organized groups, and there was like an organized group out Butte that we talked to, and then looking at the scoping letters and see who took the time to write in.

CLASS PARTICIPANT: My second question is, could you talk a little bit about why you think you weren't able to get at people's feelings about the various alternatives?

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

PRESENTER: I think the main reason is we were trying to do way too much, and I'm embarrassed -- the interview guide is in there and it's just so long, and I think if we would have sat down with an environmental advocate and talked with them about the two or three issues that they were most concerned about -- because we were there for a couple of hours. We could have gotten at that, but I think it's really hard for people -- for somebody to go from: I want you to do this with the riparian area to what effect that's going to have on that individual. But I think it's possible. I just think -- the other thing that, in looking at this stuff that I think I would do would be to hire an expert to spend some time with the methodology that we were using, because I think methodologies have developed a lot, and I don't know that I arranged things the best way they could have been arranged, and there are people now that are doing this for a living. There's people in Montana doing this all the time. And so maybe having somebody who does this, who is an expert in this, helping to arrange things. I made some mistakes, and I think one of them was trying to ask way too much information. So I think it was the time factor.

Yes?

CLASS PARTICIPANT: Following up actually on both of Sandra's questions, but the first one, picking the groups, it sounds like you found groups you wanted, but even within the group you were looking for that diversity; is that correct?

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

PRESENTER: Yeah, I think you have to. You know, to make the assumption that everybody within a particular group is the same is going to get you in trouble, although when you write it up, that's kind of what you're doing.

CLASS PARTICIPANT: The second part whether you're actually doing the interviews, and it sounds like you thought you were asking too much and taking too long, so like if you were concentrating on one group, I think you were saying maybe you should just concentrate on their few issues versus like the whole laundry list?

PRESENTER: Yes. I would say yes. And it really depends on what you're trying to do, because I was trying to get at community-type things, what's going on in the community, what's happened in the last 20 years at the same time I was doing issue stuff, and I think the community stuff I could have talked a much smaller number of people and probably gotten pretty much how people felt about what was going on and just eliminated that type of question from everybody else, or ask maybe one question rather than five? And I think that's where if I had talked to somebody who does this all the time I would have realized that it was just too much. It was fun. I think the people enjoyed it. I think we got a lot of information, but I think it probably wasn't done in the way that would have gathered the best information for impact analysis.

And when we go over the King Range, they have a really nicely done chapter 3

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

describing the area and then their impacts are a lot more sparse, and I think they ran into the same issue there. They did their data collection during scoping, and I think -- and it's really hard to anticipate if you do it that early what types of things you're going to be looking at during impact analysis.

CLASS PARTICIPANT: That brings up a point we'll talk about later, because sequencing is really important. The resource effects have to be done first, then the social and economic follow on that, and so in some cases you might, as you said, have to do two sets of interviews, some general stuff up front. If you want to know the effects of the alternatives on people, you have to have estimated the biophysical effects. We have to decide what the resource allocations are so you have a concise statement of what those are for people to react to. And so there is a sequence. You can't do all this in parallel. You can't do the social and economic in parallel with the hydrology, the recreation and the wildlife. The social and the economic have to come after the recreation, wildlife and hydrology so you know what those effects are to ask, then, people what's their reaction those effects.

PRESENTER: And one thing that Stacy mentioned yesterday about thresholds is it seems like you could do some interviewing and just focus on that, trying to establish when things have gone over a certain threshold. And that, like I said, social impact analysis, for this type of work is evolving, and that may be the next thing that's coming.

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

The King Range interviews, this is the one that we're using as an example. This again was done by John Russell, and he's -- he does great work. It was 40 face-to-face one-to-two-hour interviews. They didn't -- it's at the scoping level, and they were doing this to identify the types of groups in the area, the relationship of the groups in the area to the King Range BLM lands and to identify issues in the area, and it was a fairly intense project to be done at that level.

They used network sampling, which is they talked to somebody and then asked them if there were some other people they should talk to about the area. So it's kind of, I think, called snowball sampling in some contexts.

Let's see, again, this was a plan that had very strong social issues in it in terms of working with the community, the uniqueness of the area, wanting to maintain the naturalness.

I'm going to skip the interview goals for this because it's fairly similar to the other things that we've talked about.

I wanted to bring up the -- whoops -- the Missouri River real quickly, because that's a plan that I just worked on that we didn't do any new data collection on, and the primary reason we didn't was the bottom point, management considered it too volatile for us to be talking to people. And I don't necessarily agree with that, but that was a decision that they made, that they felt we would just incite

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

people by talking to them, which seems odd.

Anyway, so I wanted to talk a little bit about how we gathered the information that we had. There was again, and I've been really lucky, there was a lot of existing information on this area. The University of Montana had done a lot of recreation surveys. They'd been hired to prepare some documents for the area. So that worked pretty well. Really heavy use of scoping information. We got over 70,000 comments on the final and 10,000 of them were not form letters. So we got a lot of information from that plan. We had cooperators from tribes. We had cooperators from Fish & Wildlife Service, from the state and county representatives that attended every meeting and acted as -- pretty much as team members. So that was really useful. And what I did with these people is I would talk to them after the team meetings and I tried to document as much as I could because I didn't really have any other method of gathering information. So -- and that's something I don't do as much as I should, but in terms of documenting when you talk to people, what they said, that type of thing, is really important, especially if you're not going to be able to do any primary data collection.

The other thing that really worked well for this plan, and this includes myself, because I worked in that area for a long time, probably for 20 years, so there was a comfort level with that area and with the people in the area that I didn't have to -- like in the Dillon area I felt like I had to go out and gather all this information. And then the people, the Resource Specialists had been in the area for a long time. So again I think, you know, this brained up with what people know that

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

know the area, even if you know the area yourself is just really important.

There's a lot of knowledge within BLM.

That's pretty much what we used -- with the heavy use of the scoping, and again, as we talked about, it's a different use from the scoping than the summary that you would receive from the project manager. It's going back and going through these letters one by one and maybe grouping them by interest group and kind of seeing what commonalities you can find from that.

Okay, some tips and tricks for this. Tell a story rather than just present a mass of information. One thing that did when I went back, we practically redid the whole Missouri River draft and I went back and I put in some quotes from different people. That's kind of not how I would be comfortable doing things, but management really wanted to show that we were listening to people. So each of the interest groups that we described had some kind of representative quotes in there.

Collaborating with community members, and if possible, having people -- the collaborators -- I think that's a funny word that we use, but having the collaborators review the draft as it goes out, that type of thing, can be really useful.

As you're going through this, making sure the ground work is set up for assessing the effects you're going to be looking at. And again, I know I kind of harp on this,

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

but if you're going to hire a contractor, they have to spend some time in the area. You cannot do the social analysis from Denver or from -- although we do this all the time -- or from Seattle if you're looking at a small area in Montana.

CLASS PARTICIPANT: [inaudible]

PRESENTER: I would say as soon as you're finding out what the alternatives are going to be and then how they're going to go within the alternatives, learning more and more how people are thinking about these things. So even if you're not doing interviews, talking to people, talking to the BLM Resource Specialists about what they see going on, talking to university professors and recreation. One of the things that happened with the Upper Missouri River RMP is we decided to do on the river for motorized recreation we're doing four days motorized three days not motorized, and so even though we weren't supposed to be doing surveys, talking to people where that had happened before or talking to professors in recreation just to find out what they thought about that type of thing. You're talking to the professors that had done the studies on the river previously.

So finding out as much information early as you can about the issues for which -- the issues we're going to be assessing and then kind of the range of alternatives within that issue. Does that help? Not so sure.

I guess more what we're saying, you can't wait to the last minute to do the social, but like John said, this analysis is based on what other people are tell young you.

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

So you have to also keep a really tight knowledge of what's going on with the other resources because I can't do part of my analysis until I know what the recreation person is going to say, or what the wildlife person is going to say, because there's different groups that are very interested in how that's going to go.

Talking to the project manager, talking to the field manager, finding out if there's any type of information where what you could collect would make a difference, I think, is really important. Talking to people every chance you get and everybody that you get a chance to, just kind of making yourself known in that community. When I went to Dillon I had my child staying with one of the county commissioners who later was arrested for using crack cocaine. So it's not always a good idea, but -- this is true.

And a really key point is comparing data from different sources, especially because we're using qualitative data. It's really important that we try to verify what we're saying, and that means using case studies, research information, talking to people, but the verification process is really important.

Any questions?

It was fun.

CLASS PARTICIPANT: [inaudible] during the scoping or [inaudible] prior to the

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

scoping?

PRESENTER: The data collection that -- you know, I think it really depends on what you're trying to get at. I think if you are collect it during scoping you can get really robust information to put in the existing situation, but you're not going to have the information that you need to ask questions for impact analysis. So I guess I would -- if you're only going to do one collection, I think generally toward impact analysis. But the problem is if you're dependent upon the -- what other resource people uncover about their impacts, the time frame gets really short. So -- but I definitely would not recommend it before scoping and probably not during scoping because I think there are things you can do with scoping where you can get better information during scoping without doing something at the same time.

CLASS PARTICIPANT: [inaudible] thinking of -- could we -- we send a bulletin to invite people to scoping meetings and like some people can't make it or don't make it but think still want to comment and stuff, and if we included maybe like a list of these questions for your interview and that they could send them back to us that would give us a way to get this input.

PRESENTER: Yeah -- the other thing that you can do is tell people this is a number they can call. We will take their scoping comments orally and we will write them down, if that's an issue, if the way of doing it is an issue.

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

PRESENTER: If you develop your strategy early enough you can work with the people that are doing the scoping and gather information during the scoping process that's real helpful to figure out what's currently going on, what's the situation out there, help you gain some information and insights into things like alternative development, what is it that the different people like to see in terms of alternatives.

PRESENTER: Stuart?

PRESENTER: I was going to say, yeah, in some past efforts several different EIS's I've been involved with, some, for example, with the Fish & Wildlife Service on long-term refuge plans, in Alaska we would send out newsletters at scoping, during development of alternatives, you know, during the public comment period, you know. So if you have regular newsletters going out, we would always include a page that people could -- with a postage -- self-addressed postage-paid thing that would allow people to provide responses for whatever stage of the planning we were at. So they could issues. They could suggest -- once we had issues, then they could suggest ways of resolving those issues, that then we could incorporate into alternatives, and then once we had alternatives we could summarize those and then they could send back their comments on what their thoughts about the alternatives and associated impacts would be.

So, ideally, you're doing this at every stage, but recognizing that's probably not going to happen in terms of any systematic social science data collection effort,

Social and Economic Aspects of Planning Inventory Data Lessons Learned

and if -- so Joan is saying, if you can only do it once, here's a good time, but there's alternative techniques for collecting at least a little bit of information at each of those key stages of the process.

PRESENTER: And that's what John said, I think s really true, that the external affairs people kind of control the scoping, but if you work with them, there's all kinds of opportunities, and they -- at least in our offices are doing routine newsletters, and we're even having some scoping meetings or some public meetings during alternative development. So, you know, taking advantage of what's already going on and working well without external affairs can buy you a whole lot.